

The Native American
Women's Health Education
Resource Center



**A Healthy
Pregnancy Guide:**
Prenatal Care, Nutrition,
and Exercise

PRE-PREGNANCY PLANNING

It is never too early to begin learning how to take care of yourself and your baby. If you are thinking about having a baby, schedule a preconception care visit with your health care provider.

How to prepare yourself for pregnancy:

- ☐ Eat a balanced diet which includes 0.4 mg of folic acid and 15 mg of iron.
- ☐ Stop any use of alcohol, cigarettes, and other drugs. The use of these substances by you or your partner can cause permanent harm to your baby at any time during pregnancy.
- ☐ Get tested for HIV and other STDs. If you test positive for any STD, talk with your doctor about how to protect your baby.
- ☐ Tell a trusted resource if you are a victim of domestic violence. Physical abuse harms not only you, but also your unborn baby.

PRENATAL CARE

What is prenatal care?

Prenatal care is regular health care for you and your baby throughout your pregnancy. **As soon as you know you're pregnant, schedule a prenatal visit with your health care provider.**

Why is prenatal care important?

Prenatal care helps you have a healthy pregnancy, labor, and delivery by:

- ☐ Providing you with health education and counseling
- ☐ Making sure that your pregnancy is progressing normally

- ☐ Detecting and treating health problems as they occur

What can I expect at my prenatal visits?

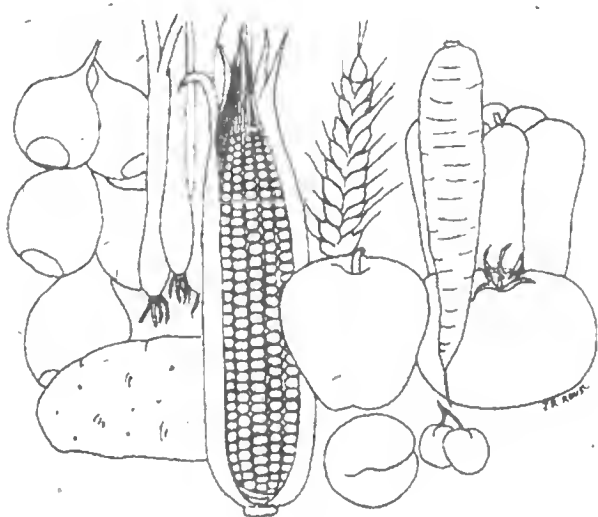
At your first two prenatal visits, you and your doctor should discuss your lifestyle, medical history, and any medications that you are currently taking. In addition, your doctor should give you a pelvic exam, estimate a due date for your baby's birth, and possibly prescribe prenatal vitamins.

During monthly follow-up visits, your doctor should record your weight, blood pressure, blood glucose level, the size of your uterus, and the fetal heartbeat. Other tests for infection and birth defects may also be suggested.

Prenatal visits are an excellent time to raise any questions or concerns you have about your pregnancy.

NUTRITION

A healthy diet is important during pregnancy because everything you eat is also eaten by your baby. Choosing nutritious foods will help your baby grow and develop normally. In order to nourish yourself and your baby, you need 2,500 calories each day (instead of 2,200), and more protein, iron, and calcium than before pregnancy.



How many servings should I eat from each food group?

The Recommended Daily Allowances* for pregnant women are:

- ☐ 6-11 servings from the Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group
- ☐ 3-5 servings of Vegetables
- ☐ 2-4 servings of Fruits
- ☐ 3 servings from the Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts Group
- ☐ 4 servings from the Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group
- ☐ Minimal amounts of fats and oils

*Recommended servings will vary depending on individual weight at the beginning of pregnancy. Talk with your doctor about your recommended servings.

What nutrients do I need to get during pregnancy?

Vitamins and minerals prevent birth defects and build bones, muscles, and blood cells for you and your baby. Make sure that your diet includes:

Protein. Pregnant women need at least **60g** of protein each day to build muscle and tissue for both mother and baby. It is recommended that you eat 3 servings of protein each day. Sources of protein include:

- ☐ meat
- ☐ poultry
- ☐ fish
- ☐ beans (kidney, pinto, etc.)

Folic Acid. Pregnant women need **0.4 mg** (400 micrograms) of folic acid each day to prevent birth defects of the brain and spine.

The best way to get folic acid is to eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. If your diet is lacking in fruits and vegetables, it may be necessary to take a daily multivitamin supplement containing folate. Sources of folic acid include:

- ☐ green leafy vegetables (spinach, asparagus, and broccoli)
- ☐ citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit)
- ☐ orange juice
- ☐ enriched breads and cereals
- ☐ beans (kidney, pinto, etc.)

Iron. Pregnant women need at least **30 mg** of iron each day to maintain healthy blood for both mother and baby. Unlike folic acid, your iron requirements usually cannot be met by diet alone. Most women need to take supplementary iron pills. However, it is still important to include iron-rich foods in your diet. Sources of iron include:

- ☐ red meat
- ☐ poultry
- ☐ fish
- ☐ green leafy vegetables (spinach, asparagus, broccoli)
- ☐ beans (kidney, pinto, etc.)
- ☐ eggs



Calcium. Pregnant women need at least **1200 mg** of calcium each day to build strong bones and teeth for both mother and baby. It is important to make an effort to include extra calcium in your diet, since during pregnancy you need 400 mg more than you would normally.

Make sure that you get at least 3-4 servings from the Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group every day. Some women will still need to take a calcium supplement.

Sources of calcium include:

- ☐ milk
- ☐ yogurt
- ☐ cheese
- ☐ ice cream
- ☐ green leafy vegetables (spinach, asparagus, broccoli)

Fluids. Pregnant women need to drink at least **6-8 glasses of water** each day. Your body needs water for the fluid which cushions the baby inside your uterus. Water also helps remove toxins and wastes from your body.

Other good fluid sources include:

- ☐ milk
- ☐ fruit juice
- ☐ vegetable juice
- ☐ soup

Caffienated beverages such as soft drinks, coffee, and tea are not good sources of fluid because caffiene drains water from your body. Caffiene is a stimulant which may increase your risk of miscarriage and premature delivery. It is safest for pregnant women not to consume caffiene at all during pregnancy.

Why should I take prenatal vitamins?

Prenatal vitamins are dietary supplements which contain your recommended daily allowances of folic acid, iron, and additional vitamins and minerals which may be missing from your diet. These supplements do not replace a well-balanced diet. You still need to eat a variety of nutritious foods even if you take prenatal vitamins.

You may need to see a nutritionist if:

- ☐ you have diabetes
- ☐ you are a vegetarian
- ☐ you are lactose intolerant
- ☐ you are under 20 years old or over 35 years old

WEIGHT & EXERCISE

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy?

The amount of weight you should gain depends on your weight at the beginning of pregnancy. Most women gradually gain about 25-35 lbs. However, women who are underweight should gain more than 25-35 lbs, and women who are overweight should gain less. **Talk with your doctor about the best weight gain for you.**

Why is it important to exercise during pregnancy?

Exercise has many benefits for pregnant women. It can help ease common discomforts of pregnancy like backache, constipation, fatigue, and swelling. Exercise can also help your body support extra weight by strengthening your muscles.

What types of exercise are recommended for pregnant women?

It is recommended that pregnant women do non-weightbearing activities, such as swimming or stationary cycling. Walking and gentle stretching are also recommended.

Although it is safe for most women to exercise during pregnancy, it is not safe for all women. **Talk with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.**

WARNING SIGNS:

Contact your health provider **immediately** if you experience any of these symptoms during pregnancy:

- ☐ vaginal bleeding
- ☐ strong cramps or abdominal pain
- ☐ prolonged backache
- ☐ fever
- ☐ swollen face, hands, or feet
- ☐ severe headache
- ☐ blurred vision

For More Information:

The March of Dimes Resource Center
Toll-free: 888-MODIMES
www.modimes.org

American College of Obstetricians
and Gynecologists
(202) 638-5577
www.acog.com

National Maternal and Child Health Hotline
1-800-311-BABY

South Dakota Maternal and Child Health Hotline
1-800-529-5000

and

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